



## Shifting Instructional Models

To: Dr. Joel Boyd, Superintendent of Schools

From: Dr. James P. Hall, Chief Operating Officer

Date: October 16, 2020

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On October 7, 2020, the Board of Health requested “the School Department forward their plan to the Board of Health and the Health Department” (see enclosure). You provided a plan on October 14, 2020 which reduced student population from 25% to 3% (see enclosure). The Board’s understanding was that DESE guidelines recommend that school systems review the 3 weeks of case rate data as well as consider the community wide spread to determine when a system should go to 100% remote learning” (see enclosure).

The Reopening Memorandum with the UTL also establishes:

33. **PANDEMIC METRICS TO CANCEL IN-PERSON LEARNING.** The superintendent will make decisions to close in-person learning entirely, district-wide, after consideration of DESE guidance published on September 14, 2020 on how to review the Department of Public Health’s Weekly Covid-19 Health Report, and after consultation with the Health Department. The parties acknowledge that this guidance from DESE may change and the Superintendent will consider any new guidance in making such decisions.

I recommend, in order to allow for the most notice, safety, and continuity of education that the School Committee establish a similar “considerable threshold” for school re-opening at or above 25% in that we:

“review the 3 weeks of case rate data as well as consider the community wide spread to determine when a system should first go back to 25% or greater in-person learning, after consultation with the Health Department and/or Board of Health.”



CITY OF LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

TO: Joel Boyd, Lowell Public Schools Superintendent

James Hall, Chief Operations Officer, LPS

John Leahy, Mayor, School Committee Chairman

Eileen Donoghue, City Manager

FROM: Jo-Ann Keegan, Chairperson, Lowell Board of Health

DATE: October 8, 2020

RE: Board of Health Motion of October 7, 2020 Relative to Remote Learning

Please be advised that during the October 7, 2020 Board of Health Meeting, discussion occurred relative to the increase in the number of COVID-19 positive cases being reported in the City of Lowell and the increase of the positivity rate over the past 2 weeks. It is the Board's understanding that DESE guidelines recommend that school systems review the 3 weeks of case rate data as well as consider the community wide spread to determine when a system should go to 100% remote learning. In discussion of the case situation in Lowell, and upon the Commonwealth's release of the October 7, 2020 figures, the Board made the following motion:

**Motion:** To request the School Department for their plan for going remote and to inform them that the Board believes three weeks in the red is a considerable threshold to support remote learning made by William Galvin, seconded by Lisa Golden. All in favor.

The Board requests the School Department forward their plan to the Board of Health and the Health Department at their earliest convenience

## **M e m o r a n d u m**

**To: Honorable Chair JoAnn Keegan and Members of the Lowell Board of Health**  
**From: Dr. Joel D. Boyd, Superintendent of Lowell Public Schools**  
**Date: October 14, 2020**  
**RE: Response to the Lowell Board of Health's Motion on COVID-19 Data and Remote Learning**

The District is in receipt of the Board of Health's memo dated October 8, 2020, which communicated the Board of Health's opinion that three consecutive weeks of red coding on the Commonwealth's COVID-19 community risk dashboard was a significant threshold to support remote learning and requesting the District's plan for shifting to remote learning if such a situation was to occur in Lowell. Following the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)'s guidance to work in consultation with local health officials in making decisions regarding COVID-19 data and its impact on the District's instructional model, this memo outlines Lowell Public Schools plan to adhere to the Board of Health's recommendation to shift to remote learning following three weeks of "high risk" or "red" status on the Commonwealth's dashboard.

### **Lowell Public Schools' Instructional Model, Safety Precautions and COVID-19 Data**

On August 5, 2020, the Lowell School Committee unanimously approved an instructional model for the 2020-2021 academic year in accordance with DESE requirements that included options for families of either full-time in-person learning or full-time remote learning as long as the local health data supported in-person instruction.

On August 5, 2020, the Lowell School Committee unanimously approved a school assignment policy that prioritized access to the District's limited in-person seats for the District's highest need and most vulnerable populations.

As part of the District's reopening plan, the District began in-person learning with a phased approach that considered overall population sizes within buildings and included - among the safety protocols to mitigate the risk of spread of COVID-19 within school buildings - only utilizing exterior classrooms with working windows and requiring 6-feet of distance between all students and staff, which significantly reduced the number of students and staff on campuses at the start of the school year. The plan included a goal of increasing the number of students who had access to in-person learning as the year progressed and if supported by the local health data.

On September 17, 2020, Lowell Public Schools began the 2020-2021 school year with approximately 5% of the total student population rostered for full-time, in-person learning.

On September 28, 2020, following the installation of air purifiers in all classrooms, the District increased the number of students rostered for full-time in-person learning to approximately 25% of the total student population.

On September 30, 2020, Lowell was coded "red" or "high risk" on the Commonwealth's COVID-19 dashboard for the first time with an average of 10.9 incidences per 100,000 over the prior 14 day period.

On October 7, 2020, Lowell was coded "red" for a second consecutive week with an average of 16.3 incidences per 100,000 over the prior 14 day period.

On October 8, 2020, the District received a memo from the Lowell Board of Health which stated that three consecutive weeks of red status was a significant threshold to support a shift to full remote learning.

On October 13, 2020, the Chair of the Lowell Board of Health advised the District that at the Board's October 7, 2020, meeting, the Board of Health discussed that Lowell's coding of "yellow" on the State's dashboard on September 23, 2020, was also a concern as the average incidences were at 7.9 and only one case away from being "red" at that time which would have put Lowell at "red" for 4 weeks on October 7, 2020. The Chair further advised the District that (1) the COVID-19 trend for Lowell is "not good," (2) the increase in cases is due to community-wide spread and not due to "clusters," and (3) the Board felt that "going full remote" was supported by the current data. The Chair shared that fixing the air quality and having air purifiers and other protections have gone a long way toward reducing risk in school buildings; however, based on public health guidelines and data, the recommendation was a shift to a full remote instructional model.

### **Responses in Other School Communities to 3 Weeks of "High Risk" Status**

Several other communities in the Commonwealth have experienced consecutive weeks of "red" or "high risk" status on the Commonwealth's COVID-19 dashboard. Responses to that data have varied across communities in relation to the local school district's instructional model. The table below summarizes what was gathered through outreach to selected school districts.

Boston	Continuing to serve limited, high need populations in-person; delayed further expansion of in-person learning
Chelsea	Districtwide remote learning from the start of school
Everett	Districtwide remote learning from the start of school
Framingham	Continuing to serve limited, high need populations in-person; delayed further expansion of in-person learning
Haverhill	Continuing with its initial hybrid instructional model; delayed further expansion of in-person learning
Lawrence	Districtwide remote learning from the start of school
Revere	Districtwide remote learning from the start of school
Worcester	Districtwide remote learning from the start of school

### **Next Steps for Lowell Public Schools**

1. From an educational perspective, Lowell Public Schools believes that although remote learning has been significantly improved since the spring and can approximate in-person learning, nothing can take the place of face-to-face instruction in meeting the social, emotional and academic needs of Lowell's students. An on-campus, in-person learning model remains the model by which Lowell's most at-risk and vulnerable students can most meaningfully access instruction.
2. However, in responding to this global health crisis, Lowell Public Schools has committed to following the prevailing data and adhering to the advice of health experts in all decisions related to the safety and health of students, staff and families.
3. On October 9, 2020, families were provided with notice that "if Lowell is again coded 'red' next week, the district will shift to a full remote learning model beginning at the start of school on Monday, October 19, 2020." It was noted that LPS would continue to study possible exceptions for smaller special programs and will communicate any potential exceptions next week.
4. If Lowell is coded "red" for a third consecutive week on the State's dashboard on October 14, Lowell Public Schools will shift to a full remote model in accordance with the recommendation of the Lowell Board of Health with the following parameters:
  - a. Similar to the models in a few other districts, students with special needs, who are assigned to substantially separate academic programs in Lowell Public Schools will continue to attend school in-person, reducing the overall District in-person enrollment from over 3,000 students to under 500 students, with individual school enrollment

ranging from 0 to 41 in elementary and middle school buildings and 55 students at Lowell High which also has significantly more square footage across its buildings.

- b. The School Committee will discuss at its October 21, 2020, meeting the continuation of on-campus athletics, extra-curriculars, clubs and other limited, standalone programs.
  - c. The School Committee will discuss at its October 21, 2020, meeting the continuation of the use of District facilities by external organizations.
5. The District will continue to adjust its instructional model based on three weeks of trend data related to the transmission of COVID-19 in the community and the ongoing advice of the Lowell Board of Health.